



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Public Hearing – March 9, 2009  
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Gina McCarthy  
Department of Environmental Protection

### **Raised Senate Bill No. 994, AN ACT CONCERNING LEGHOLD TRAPS**

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Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised Senate Bill No. 994, AN ACT CONCERNING LEGHOLD TRAPS

The Department strongly opposes the language in this bill, which prohibits the regulated use of padded foothold and conibear traps. The proposed bill would be extremely detrimental to wildlife management in Connecticut because it would eliminate the most effective, and for some species, the only effective tool, for reducing human conflicts caused by a variety of wild mammals. Specifically it would eliminate the use of the only practical devices to control and prevent damage caused by coyotes and beavers; two very abundant species that cause hundreds of serious problems for Connecticut property owners. More restrictions on the use of traps will not have any impact on people who ignore the law.

The current use of foothold and conibear traps in Connecticut conforms to the Best Management Practices (BMPs) established by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The recent BMP research conducted in the United States and Canada represents the most extensive scientific evaluation of animal traps ever conducted. This effort was undertaken over a 15 year period pursuant to an International treaty to establish humane standards for traps. After spending tens of millions of dollars to evaluate all traps, many have been discontinued and replaced with new humane traps. Traps were evaluated on five criteria: animal welfare, efficiency, selectivity, practicality and safety. In addition, Connecticut laws and regulations, which are among the strictest in the nation, further restrict the use of foothold and conibear traps by specifying how, when and where such traps may be set and by establishing requirements for mandatory trapper education, mandatory landowner permission, and mandatory trap check intervals.

Padded foothold traps used in accordance with the BMPs are versatile and selective for capturing free ranging wildlife and restraining them unharmed. In fact, such traps are routinely used by wildlife researchers to capture birds and mammals, including rare species such as bald eagles and Canada lynx, alive and unharmed for study. Foothold traps are the only practical live capture device for coyotes, a species that is abundant in the state and increasingly the source of citizen complaints due to killing livestock and pets and displaying bold behavior towards humans. In 2005 the Department established a special 2-month coyote trapping season that allows the use of padded foothold traps on land. This regulation, which included a variety of requirements that trappers must fulfill to participate, provided additional coyote control options for landowners with more than 10 acres and has not resulted in any reported problems.

Unlike foothold traps, conibears are not live traps. They function like a mouse trap, quickly killing the animal by striking the head, neck or body with lethal force. Because animals captured in conibears cannot be released unharmed, regulations allow them to be set only under the surface of the water for the capture of aquatic furbearers. They are the most effective tool for capturing beaver and muskrats.

Despite the fact that Connecticut is a densely populated state, many species of wild animals occur at artificially high densities due to our land use practices. We cannot overlook the fact that the balance of nature has been severely disrupted by man's activities. Regulated trapping, including the judicious use of foothold and conibear traps, serves a very important role in reducing human/wildlife conflicts in the State. Again, more restrictions on the use of traps will not prevent the illegal use.

The Wildlife Division has limited resources to directly assist the public with problem wildlife and uses regulated trapping as way to balance wildlife populations with human interests. Thus, trained trappers perform a valuable and free service for many landowners. According to the annual trapper survey, approximately 59% of the beaver and 50% of the coyotes trapped during the regulated seasons were taken to resolve problems caused by these species. During the two year period (2006-08), the Wildlife Division responded to approximately 631 calls concerning coyote problems and 372 concerning foxes. During the same two-year interval, the Wildlife Division was called to assist with 505 beaver complaints. If foothold and conibear traps were eliminated as proposed in this bill, the number of requests for assistance would escalate dramatically and the Department would not have the resources nor would licensed trappers have the tools to address these problems.

The Department believes that regulated trapping is essential in maintaining a balance between humans and wildlife, especially species that exist at high densities and cause serious problems. We continue to investigate additional management tools, but there is no replacement for the foothold and conibear traps at this time. The types and sizes of these traps and where they can be used is highly regulated and conforms with modern international standards. Our ENCON Police will continue to enforce our regulations and will investigate any and all reported violations.

The Department has been diligent in implementing the results of the international BMP research to develop regulations and training programs that reduce the capture of non-target species and injury to animals captured in foothold traps set on land. Such foothold traps must be padded and have a gap between the arms in the closed position; the trap chain must be no longer than 6 inches with a shock absorbing spring incorporated; and swivels must be located at each end of the chain, with the center one mounted below the trap. The padded foothold traps are also equipped with a pan tensioning device that can be adjusted so that a trap set for a coyote will not spring if stepped on by a much lighter mammal or bird. In addition, trappers must attend a separate and mandatory land trapping course where they are taught how to use trap sets that are species specific, including a provision that no visible bait may be used.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert La France, Legislative Liaison at 424-3401.